



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **8 – 14 March 2010**



11 March 1918 Lt. Paul Baer of the 103d Aero Squadron downed an enemy airplane and earned the **first Distinguished Service Cross awarded to a member of an Army air unit**. U.S. pilots with earlier aerial victories had served with the French.

10 March 1934 **Airmail suspension.** The Army Air Corps temporarily suspended domestic airmail deliveries because of nine crash fatalities. Lack of instruments in Army aircraft for night and bad-weather flying contributed to the accidents. After some reorganization, equipment overhauls, and reduction of routes and flights, Air Corps airmail flights resumed on March 19.



10 March 1943 **Composite wing.** The Army Air Forces activated Fourteenth Air Force at Kunming, China, under Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault, former commander of the American Volunteer Group, the “Flying Tigers.” Fourteenth Air Force, which included a composite wing composed of U.S. and Chinese pilots, conducted tactical air operations against Japanese forces occupying China. (Photo at left.)

9 March 1945 **Area bombing of Tokyo.** More than 300 B-29s dropped incendiary bombs that destroyed 16 square miles of Tokyo—about a fourth of the city. In terms of immediate loss of life (80,000-100,000), this air raid was the most destructive in history. The attack reflected a shift in U.S. bombardment policy from high-altitude daylight attacks on specific military targets to low-level area bombing at night in order to demoralize the Japanese. (Photo at right donated by *Corbis-Bettmann* to the Japan Society.)



12 March 1946 **Air University designated.** The Army Air Forces School at Maxwell Field was redesignated Air University, with jurisdiction over Air Command and Staff School, Air War College, and four bases.



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8 March 1953 F-86 Saber pilot Joseph McConnell destroyed his sixth MiG-15 in aerial combat over Korea. The following month McConnell downed three MiG-15s in one day, becoming the **first jet fighter “Triple Ace.”**

9 March 1959 **First PACAF F-102s.** The 16th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron at Naha AB, Okinawa, became the first squadron in PACAF to convert to Convair's F-102 Delta Dagger. The unit, previously equipped with F-86D Sabres, became operationally ready later in September.

10 March 1966 Major Bernard F. Fisher, a 1st Air Commando Squadron A-1E pilot, became the **first USAF Medal of Honor recipient in Vietnam.** Maj. Fisher (photo below) led an attack on enemy forces surrounding an outpost in the A Shau Valley at the extreme northwest of South



Vietnam. Fisher observed the crash landing of fellow A-1E pilot Maj. D. Wayne Meyers, who landed on a battered landing strip under intense enemy fire. Fisher decided to attempt to rescue Myers himself. In an outstanding display of airmanship, he landed on the runway that was littered with oil barrels, rocket casings, and fragments of aircraft and was pocked by holes from mortar fire. As he passed the downed aircraft, he saw Myers jump up from the ditch and run toward him. Myers could not climb up on the wing because of prop wash, so Fisher throttled back, reached out to grasp Myers, and pulled him into the cockpit headfirst. Without taking time to buckle up, he once more turned his aircraft around, fire-walled the throttle, and took off, again avoiding the

impediments on the runway. With 19 bullet holes in the aircraft, they cleared the mountains and made it safely to Pleiku. For his outstanding courage and airmanship, Maj Fisher received the Medal of Honor.



Lt. Col. Merlyn H. Dethlefsen

10 March 1967 Captain Merlyn Hans Dethlefsen earned the **Medal of Honor** during the first bombing mission against the Thai Nguyen industrial works in North Vietnam. The Thai Nguyen works was the only plant in Southeast Asia making bridge sections, barges, and POL drums. Maj. Dethlefsen was a pilot in a flight of F-105 aircraft engaged in a fire suppression mission designed to destroy the anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missile sites protecting the targets. Maj Dethlefsen repeatedly attacked the SAM defenses even after his aircraft was severely damaged. To make sure the SAM site wouldn't come up the next day, he hosed the site with his 20mm cannon, headed for a tanker, and nursed his damaged F-105 back to Takhli, 500 miles away. He was the third of 12 airmen to be awarded the nation's highest decoration for valor during the Vietnam War.



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10 March 1967 Capt Mac C. Brestel, an F-105 pilot with the 355th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand, became the **first USAF pilot to down two MiGs in one mission in the Vietnam War.**

10 March 1977 The **first female navigator candidates** reported to Mather AFB for undergraduate navigator training.

14 March 1988 E-Systems Inc. unveiled the new **MC-130H Combat Talon II** special operations airlifter. This aircraft is designed to infiltrate/exfiltrate troops and resupply them behind enemy lines. Its navigation and terrain-avoidance systems allow the aircraft to fly as low as 250 feet at night and in adverse weather and to locate unmarked zones with pinpoint accuracy. The tail was strengthened to allow high speed/low-signature airdrop. The aircraft is also equipped with aerial refueling pods to provide in-flight refueling of SOF and CSAR helicopters.

10 March 1995 **TBM warning.** The 11th Space Warning Squadron became the first unit with the ability to warn battlefield commanders of incoming theater ballistic missiles, such as the Scud missiles fired by Iraq in DESERT STORM.

8 Mar 2006 **North Korea was reported to have test-fired two short-range missiles** within its borders on Wednesday, even as six-nation talks over its nuclear program remain deadlocked. The missiles were launched in the direction of China, the Japanese news media first reported, citing unidentified defense officials. American officials in Washington confirmed the reports.

10 March 2006 The United States and Malaysia joined forces for **Cope Taufan '06**, a three-week air-to-air training exercise designed to sharpen air combat tactic skills and promote closer relations between allies. Cope Taufan (Taufan means “big storm” in Malaysian) is held bi-annually near the northwest coast of that country. Eight F-15 Eagles and more than 114 maintainers, munitions handlers and pilots from the 18th Wing participated in the exercise. The Malaysian AF flew MiG-29s in this exercise, providing USAF pilots with the “chance of a lifetime” opportunity to fly against “the real thing.” (see photo of MiG-29 involved in Cope Taufan, above).

